

Book Reviews

Marsha Daigle-Williamson, *Reflecting the Eternal: Dante's Divine Comedy in the Novels of C.S. Lewis*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015. 330 pp. ISBN 978-1-61970-665-1.

This book, under one certainly of its aspects, is a *tour de force*, a nothing if not comprehensive review of the notional and expressive links, as the author sees them, between on the one hand eight of C.S. Lewis's most cherished texts (cherished, that is to say, by successive generations of readers) and, on the other, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante, the most cherished of Lewis's own texts. Meticulously researched, minutely documented, and authorized by Lewis's own confession to the effect that 'Dante's poetry, on the whole, [is] the greatest of all the poetry I have read' (p. 14), this, therefore, is a gift for the Lewis devotee, an informative and trustworthy guide to one of the most intense and enduring of his own enthusiasms.

How, then, does it all work? Following a brief indication of the author's ideal readership ('Lewis fans, teachers of Lewis and their students, Lewis critics and scholars, Dante lovers, and general readers'; p. 2) comes a brief account of the organization of the book and then a preliminary chapter on how, in Lewis's sense of it, an author might be said to relate to his predecessors in the literary tradition – by way, he thinks, of a species of imitation operative at the level not so much of form as of truth, of a drawing out and of an honouring of the ideas in one way or another informing the great literature of every generation. It is in this context that his lifelong love of Dante stands to be considered – some, at least, of the key stages of this literary affair being registered in the aforesaid Chapter 1 on 'Lewis, Dante, and Literary Predecessors'.

With this, or, more precisely, with a brief account of the *Commedia* for the benefit of those not as yet familiar with it, the main business

of the book gets under way. Each of the aforesaid ‘cherished texts’ – namely, the *Pilgrim’s Regress*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *The Screentape Letters*, *Perelandra*, *That Hideous Strength*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Till We Have Faces* – is in turn reviewed with respect to their various levels and species of Dantean awareness: direct quotations and paraphrases of the text, lexis, narrative and expressive strategies, and, above all, the kinds of transformation whereby the leading idea in Dante is confirmed and explored by way of an alternative fiction. Each chapter comes with a generous introduction to the text, to the issues it raises, and to the circumstances of its coming about; and the whole thing is rounded off by a set of notes documenting successive emphases along the way and by a bibliography listing primary and secondary texts for both Lewis and Dante.

The issue here, then, is what to make of the book in respect, not so much of the surface exchanges and equivalences from Dante to Lewis, but of the in-depth of an indeed significant literary encounter. For this, diligent as it is as a record of that encounter, is a book proceeding in terms, precisely, of surface resemblance, of the kinds of high-level narrative and expressive parallels witnessing, certainly, to the intensity of it all but not, I think, at any deeper level, to the kind of *otherness* which, in the white heat of the moment, quickens *sameness* from deep within itself. Now this, clearly, as a comment upon what is going on here, needs careful statement, for proceeding as it does by way of accumulated likeness – and quite explicitly here it is a question of ‘resonance’, of ‘recalling’, of ‘paralleling’, of ‘adapting’, of ‘connecting’, of ‘linking with’, of ‘resembling’, of, in short, the vocabulary of surface similarity – just about everything along the way takes us *by implication* into the depths, into the presence of C.S. Lewis as one encountering, amid the problematics of his own humanity, a kindred spirit in the great poet of the *Commedia*.

But, having pondered one by one the literally scores of particular instances, and having paused case by case to consider their persuasiveness in the varying degrees thereof, that is exactly what we wish ultimately to know; since for all the surface similarities of the text, and indeed for all his professed affection for Dante as pre-eminent in the area of European letters (alongside him, Lewis says at one point, even Shakespeare looks ‘factitious’, a bit made up as he goes

along), Lewis was not Dante and Dante, most certainly, was not Lewis. For to stand in the presence of Dante is to stand in the presence of a poet, philosopher and ultimately prophet of unique power, prescience and intensity, of one engaged as of the essence in a celebration of the Godhead, as but an incessant opening out in fresh channels of love to the properly speaking ecstatic substance of human experience, as but a participation in the life of the One, and to the power and economy of the word not merely as 'poetry' but as the very form of human being in the moment of its actualization – in short, to (as one great Italian critic once put it) the 'serietà terribile' or terrifying seriousness of it all.

Now it is much to Lewis's credit as a critic that he himself saw this in Dante, indeed that he himself delighted in the soaring spirituality of the text, and even more to his credit that he seeks in his own fiction to honour that spirituality and to rejoice in its exemplary substance. But the differences even so persist, for quite apart from the fact that Lewis was not in any sense a love-poet of the stature and intensity of Dante, he had, in truth, no genuinely developed sense either of the economy or of the ontological status of the word as but the form of human experience in act, as that whereby the poet knows himself and is in turn known in the 'astripetal' or star-seeking truth of his presence in the world (the 'nolint astripetam aquilam imitari' moment of the *De vulgari eloquentia*). Instead, – and for myself I can, alas, see no way round the difficulty here – the superb economy of the prophetic utterance in Dante is overtaken in Lewis by a more or less insistent species of moralism and, for the most part, an excess of simple and rarely particularly engaging allegorism, of the kind of either/or-ness straightaway superseded in the Dante of the *Commedia* by something immeasurably more powerful. True, some texts, such as (among those assembled here) the *Scriventape Letters*, take us indeed – and this quite brilliantly – into the recesses of Lewis's own spirituality, but this, I think, in those moments where his Dantism is at its most attenuated, its least intrusive.

What, then, are we to say about this book? What needs to be said, I think, is that, in registering as she does any number of resonances and resemblances between what she calls Lewis's 'novels' and the *Commedia*, Marsha Daigle-Williamson has indeed – as the blurb on the back of the book says – filled a 'significant gap in C.S. Lewis

scholarship'; and that, clearly, is all to the good. More than this, she has confirmed one of the many ways in which Dante stands to be admired and emulated by the more gifted and sensitive of his readers over the generations, and that too is all to the good. But what is needed now when it comes to C.S. Lewis and Dante is a reaching down beneath the surface similarities into the depths and differences of personality, into the way in which Dante and, among his universal 'lettori', Lewis in particular enter into communion one with another for the purposes of addressing and resolving the problematics of their shared humanity – a task, this, wholly more taxing, to be sure, but apt in its addressing and in its accomplishment to bring us that bit closer to what actually matters here.

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Gregory Bassham (ed.), *C. S. Lewis's Christian Apologetics: Pro and Con*. Value Inquiry Book Series: Philosophy and Religion, Vol. 286. Leiden, Netherlands: Rodopi-Brill, 2015. 272pp. ISBN 978-90-04-30125-2.

There is hope for Lewis scholarship. When Victor Reppert published his book *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea* about Lewis's Argument from Reason in 2003, he still felt it necessary to start with a chapter 'Taking C. S. Lewis Seriously?'. In the present volume, there are ten renowned philosophers (nearly all of them Professors of Philosophy) seriously debating about the nature and strength of *C. S. Lewis's Christian Apologetics*. This is encouraging, for it seems that more than 50 years after Lewis's death, there is still something to learn *about* Lewis, and there also seems to be something that can be learnt *from* him.

The book concentrates on five central apologetic arguments of Lewis that are debated in two rounds between a defender and a critic: Defense of the argument – Critique of the argument – Reply of the defender – Reply of the critic. These five arguments are: 1. The Argument from Desire; 2. The Argument from Reason; 3. The

Moral Argument; 4. The Trilemma Argument; 5. The Problem of Evil. According to its editor Gregory Bassham, the aim of the book is to counteract the fact that Lewis's apologetics has received much less scholarly attention than it actually deserves. And his hope is to achieve this aim by presenting a book that is accessible to general readers, but which is nevertheless able 'to explain Lewis's arguments as carefully as possible, to unpack them when necessary, and to evaluate them with the same standards of scholarly rigor and care that would be used with any other intellectually challenging author' (26). This is a worthwhile task, and the general level of philosophical discussion in the book is quite respectable (and much higher than in some previous publications), although at least some readers may find a few chapters a challenge to read.

Anyone who is concerned about the soundness of Lewis's arguments should be aware that what Lewis wrote in the field of apologetics was written *ad populum* and not as an academic treatise intended to cover every possible case, or to answer in advance every question which some of his readers could possibly raise fifty years after his death. But it is also no mere rhetoric that he had to offer in works like *Mere Christianity* or *The Pilgrim's Regress*: It is quite often possible to extrapolate from other parts of his writings a much deeper and more philosophically grounded understanding of the subject matter in question. D. Williams is therefore perfectly right to state in his defense of the Trilemma Argument that 'the classic passage from *Mere Christianity* needs to be supplemented [...] by Lewis's other writings and by information and arguments that have come to light since he wrote' (188). We could even go further and extend Williams' claim that we must let our understanding of the trilemma 'be nuanced and strengthened by its context in Lewis's body of writings as a whole' (ibid.) to *every* argument of Lewis, whether discussed in this book or not.

It should thus be expected that the first step in the present attempt to examine Lewis's arguments with 'rigor and care' would be to re-construct Lewis's view of the matter with the greatest scholarly accuracy that is attainable today. But this is unfortunately not always the case: Before they start discussing with each other, some combatants take very little time to *listen to Lewis first*. How can it be

(for example) that the Argument from Desire is discussed in a book from 2015 without a single mention of Lewis's own account of it in his *Early Prose Joy* – which was published in 2013¹ (and known much earlier)? One look into this crucial text alone would have disproved P. Williams' claim that Lewis primarily argues for the existence of Heaven and only secondarily for the existence of God (27). For here, he begins his case with the flat statement 'I am an empirical Theist. I arrived at God by induction' (*Early Prose Joy* 13). And if this were not enough, when Lewis wrote the manuscript in late 1930 or early 1931, he still believed in no afterlife at all (as he tells us in *Surprised by Joy*). These two short sentences also rule out in advance any idea that Lewis saw his argument as a logically compelling deduction in the form of an Aristotelian Syllogism (which is also discussed by both combatants). No, without looking at the *experience first* which Lewis describes, there can be no true account of what he saw as the strength of this argument. But here, Williams' presentation of Lewis's 'phenomenology of joy' is far from exhaustive (it mainly quotes long passages from Lewis without any closer analysis of them), while Bassham doesn't raise the question at all. But if the problem is not correctly set, what value can the debate about the alleged 'soundness' of Lewis's argument have? (N.B.: The readiness of both scholars (and many others too) to fan out the Argument from Desire in a whole cluster of similar but nevertheless different and mutually excluding arguments seems to be evidence enough that the true core of Lewis's argument has still to be found.)

A second case in the book exhibits the same problem. For his defense of the Moral Argument, D. Baggett draws almost solely on *Mere Christianity* and *The Poison of Subjectivism*. But he neglects virtually everything that Lewis wrote in support of this argument in *Miracles*, *The Abolition of Man*, 'On Ethics', 'De Futilitate', 'Why I Am Not a Pacifist', 'Evil and God', and 'On Living in an Atomic Age' (as well as in many other parts of his writings). His opponent E. Wielenberg does not object to this limited presentation of Lewis's views, but is content, '[i]n light of the admirable accuracy and clarity of David Baggett's

1 In *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* 30 (2013), 13-49, with an introduction by Andrew Lazo (pp. 5-12).

exposition of both Lewis's moral argument and certain elements of my critique of that argument' (141), to answer Baggett's reply to his own earlier critique. This is not really surprising, for Wielenberg himself had neglected all these essays when he discussed the Moral Argument in his book *God and the Reach of Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). In other words, Baggett takes over much of Wielenberg's account of the argument without first looking into the sources and making sure that this is all that Lewis had to say about the problem in question. But then, what can we expect their discussion to tell us about the soundness of Lewis's actual argument?

The debate between V. Reppert and K. Johnson about the Argument from Reason is much more to the point. And this is the case although Reppert begins his essay by admitting that he will not present this argument exactly as it was stated by Lewis, but in a slightly modified form (76). As the philosophical discussion of the case has advanced since Lewis's time, these modifications seem to be justified, and his basic account of the argument is still true to Lewis's original idea. In the replies of both combatants, the debate drifts even further away from Lewis's own version of the argument (he is hardly even *mentioned* in the replies), and even this may be inevitable to some extent. But a bit more focus on Lewis might nevertheless have served the purpose of examining the actual strength of his argument better. For then Johnson could have avoided suggesting that Lewis claimed to show that naturalism is epistemologically self-refuting, and arguing that Reppert, because he does not show this claim to be true, has failed to defend the argument (113f): Lewis *withdrew* this claim in the revised version of *Miracles* and Reppert is thus perfectly right when he doesn't try to defend it. But Johnson is not alone with this view: Baggett, in his defense of the Moral Argument, also suggests that Lewis's Argument from Reason shows that Naturalism is self-defeating (134).

The discussions about the Argument from Reason and the Moral Argument reveal, in fact, a deeper difficulty of the attempt to discuss the strength of Lewis's apologetic arguments today. The critics of these two arguments are convinced naturalists and base their attack on Lewis on their naturalistic belief. But the foundations of this belief (the conviction that the natural sciences provide us with our view of being; the supervenience principle; the causal closure of the physical

world) are, despite significant inroads, still so firmly rooted in today's analytical philosophy that they are seldom openly discussed. Johnson, for example, flatly states that 'neuroscience has revealed that the mental is a result of the operations of the physical brain, and no change in the mental is possible without a change in the brain. We may not yet know how the brain produces supervenient mental properties, but we can know that it does – and that is all we need' (115; this claim is made three times without adding any further evidence, cf. 94f, 101). If this is granted, then of course the rest of his critique inevitably follows. But is it really the case? Here, it would be possible to say much more in answer to this naturalistic belief from Lewis's own point of view. But then it would be necessary to open the field of discussion in order to include his epistemology, theory of science, theory of experience, and theory of language. There are many hints in his writings (and even whole essays or book chapters) that can be used to re-construct his position in these fields of philosophy, and this would provide further arguments that can be included into the discussion about the truth of naturalism. In a time when more philosophers begin to take C. S. Lewis seriously, this would be a worthwhile task, and it would be a great advance in Lewis scholarship. As has been noted at the beginning of this review: There is *hope* for Lewis scholarship.

The discussions about the Trilemma Argument and the Problem of Pain are much easier to read than the previous two debates. And in both cases, the critics are scholars who confess to be themselves very much in sympathy with Lewis: They show that there can be an honest discussion about the soundness of some of Lewis's arguments even if one is not a naturalist but a fellow Christian. It is to be expected that the debate of these two cases will also continue, and it might at least be possible that biblical scholarship, if it is not under the surface influenced by modern agnostic philosophy, has more to say in favour of Jesus' own claim to divinity than A. Barkman allows it.

One last word about Bassham's double role as editor of the book *and* one of its combatants: This double role turns out to be not a wholly happy one. Bassham pretends to be *impartial* by openly asking whether Lewis's arguments are sound, but at the same time acts as the critic of the first argument presented in the book. And it is *he* who sets the scheme of discussion for the five arguments – which of course

has the effect that the last word is always given to the critic. And, even more, he comments in his 26-page introduction on *all five arguments*. That is, he gives his own version of what he believes the arguments – especially the Argument from Reason – to be and what the combatants actually say about them (as if he wouldn't think that the experts have been able to express themselves clearly enough). And he suggests in advance that *none* of the five arguments is without weakness; he even maintains that not even the defenders of the arguments believe them to be 'completely sound and unassailable' (26). This of course comes equal to saying that *no one* thinks that any of Lewis's arguments actually proves what it purports to prove. Hadn't it been better (and more impartial) to leave it to the *reader* to draw this conclusion – if it is really the only possible conclusion that can be drawn from this book?

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Devin Brown, *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C.S. Lewis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013. vii+241 pp. ISBN 978-1587433351.

Near the end of his life, C.S. Lewis made the now humorous observation that he would be largely forgotten within five years of his passing. Indeed, when one looks back on the news making headlines on the day of his death one can't help but think he may have been right; to die within a few hours of the assassination of John F. Kennedy would guarantee that almost any person be relegated to a footnote on that fateful day and in the annals of history. Yet over 50 years later, despite the predictions of the man himself, Lewis is more popular than ever. This is evidenced by the flood of new work and recognition that came about on or near the 50th anniversary of his death, including a formal ceremony and dedication service in Poets Corner of Westminster Abbey, and the publication of two new biographies. *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C.S. Lewis* by Devin Brown, was one of them.

Brown is a Professor of English at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky. He has authored a dozen books and documentary scripts

on C.S. Lewis and his writings, and has contributed chapters and forewords to almost a dozen other works. As the full title suggests, *A Life Observed* is Brown's observations about a man whom he never met but has studied extensively, told through biography. However, it is not what one might call a 'traditional' biography. As Brown states at the beginning of his book, 'There is a kind of C.S. Lewis biography which is lengthy and definitive. In it readers find out when Lewis's great-great-grandfather was born and what Richard Lewis, for that was his name, did for a living. This is not that kind of biography' (xi). Rather than focus on traditional historical facts of Lewis's life, Brown seeks to take a 'new approach' to the growing library of Lewis biographies, instead crafting his work as a 'spiritual biography'. This means that Brown chooses to 'focus closely on the story of Lewis's spiritual journey and his search for the object of the mysterious longing he called Joy' (xi). Consequently, the book has a feel and tenor remarkably similar to that found in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis's own famous autobiography, which documents his long spiritual journey from atheist to Christian apologist. Thus, it is no wonder that *Surprised by Joy* is quoted extensively throughout.

Brown seeks out the mental, emotional and spiritual influences in Lewis's life, and it is these influences that find their way onto the pages; if they happen to require contextual grounding then so be it, but Brown feels little need to expound too much upon dates and locations. Indeed, he has no problem whatsoever jumping from 'Jacksie' the child to 'Jack' the Oxford don if it serves to illustrate the conceptual growth of a particular Lewisian theme. This makes the book both exciting and frustrating: it can be difficult to put Lewis's life into a chronological framework, but it can also be enlightening to see how the threads of Lewis' thought are woven throughout his life experiences. Consequently, at times Brown's treatment of Lewis's spiritual journey seems as confusing as Lewis's own accounting because there are not always chronological signposts by which the reader may find direction. With numerous other biographies of Lewis on the market, most of which provide that chronological framework, it seems a bit odd that Brown chose not to provide even a timeline of major events in Lewis's life. It seems odder still that Brown's chapters are *arranged chronologically*, in the manner of *Surprised by Joy*, when he so freely jumps from one

time period to the next.

A Life Observed is thus not a good biography to start with, but rather a better one to end on. It pays careful attention to Lewis's thoughts and the development of his 'intellectual imagination' (222, quoting Austin Farrer), which at times is as delightful as pure honey in a genre that can often be closer to stale bread. As Douglas Gresham, stepson and friend of Lewis, who wrote the book's preface, states, the 'real Jack whom I knew walks the pages of this book' (x). Brown also takes care to let Lewis speak on his own terms. He rarely tries to develop any new theories or suppositions about Lewis or make any speculative claims, which shows care for the subject but can also sometimes lead the reader to wonder why the book needed to be written at all. But what Brown does so expertly is narrowly focus his book to examine the larger influences which Lewis himself assumed were so apparent that he did not give them the full attention they deserved. For example, Lewis the scholar was so immersed in medieval literature that he naturally assumed people would understand his references to various texts. Brown, knowing this not to be the case, explains the context and purpose for each epigraph that starts every chapter in *Surprised by Joy*, and its significance for Lewis's thought and spiritual growth.

If Brown's work has an apparent weakness it is that he is too dependent on Lewis's own understanding of his life. He gives minimal attention to the areas of Lewis's life that Lewis himself glossed over (such as his time in France during World War I), which at times leaves the reader feeling like important information is missing. He also takes the occasional pot-shot at other Lewis biographers who have pursued paths he himself feels were unwise or misleading. This can be distracting and, frankly, unnecessary for the average reader, and it does little to support the intentions of the book in hand. But on the whole Brown's treatment of C. S. Lewis's life and spiritual influencers is a beautiful (and occasionally poetic) piece of work. If one must choose only one book to read about Lewis's life, it would be hard to recommend *A Life Observed* because of its non-traditional focus; compared to, say, Alister McGrath's *C. S. Lewis - A Life* (2013), which is more linear in its biographical and scholarly approach, Brown's treatment feels a bit scattered with few new insights. But read in tandem with a chart or biography that can fill in some of the chronological holes, *A Life*

Observed provides a clear and intimate picture of the ‘mere’ Christian who spoke so eloquently about the faith, and does so in a way that helps us see the threads of Lewis’s thinking so that they take on new life and significance. It adds one more perspective to help us better know the true, good and beautiful man whose influence is still being felt decades after he thought he would be forgotten.

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Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015. 644 pp. ISBN 9780374154097.

The notion of fellowship is central to the quest which an assorted band of hobbits, elves, dwarves (or, as Tolkien preferred, ‘dwarfs’), men and wizards first resolve upon and then – in the form of the Company of Nine Walkers, the Fellowship of the Ring – undertake in *The Lord of the Rings*, a book which was voted ‘Book of the Century’ in a poll conducted by the booksellers Waterstones in 1997 and ‘favourite novel’ in a BBC poll in 2003. Fellowship – with all its dramas and pitfalls – is also, of course, a fundamental aspect of the exploits undertaken by Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy and their associates in the Chronicles of Narnia. It is, however, a quality that in real life is extremely difficult to sustain, whether on the scale of a relationship between two people, collaboration between like-minded individuals, or a willingness to co-operate on the part of different social, racial and national groups. Precisely because of this difficulty, there is probably no endeavour that has greater importance and significance in an age where everything tends to be viewed in terms of a narrowly individual perspective. Thus the very fact that the subject of this review is a book written by two American authors about a group of British writers is in itself a manifestation of the book’s central theme as reflected in its title and, moreover, a cause for celebration.

To what extent did the Inklings succeed in constituting a fellowship of some kind? This question – which, by virtue of the title chosen by the authors, has to be of central concern to the book under discussion – is a very different one from focussing on the writings (still less on the respective mythological, theological, occult or in whatever other way esoteric backgrounds) of the authors concerned, which is a wholly valid, and also important, form of research in the context of, for example, the present journal or of the Anglo-American journal *Seven*, where in addition to J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Owen Barfield and Charles Williams, three other writers whose work has a strong ideological link to these four (George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton and Dorothy Sayers), but were for different reasons not members of the Inklings circle, are also featured. This is not to suggest that Philip and Carol Zaleski do not give considerable – and, I think, well-merited – attention to the writings of the Inklings; the point is that there is an important element in what they have undertaken which goes beyond this. By the same token, the worthiness and eventual significance of the considerable labours that must have gone into preparing such a substantial volume of research needs to be judged not pre-eminently on the authors' capacity to analyse or even briefly summarise the literary output of the individual writers known as the Inklings, which is rightly described as 'immense',¹ but on the insights that it offers into a living literary movement.

Even in the context of the present journal, it may be worth pointing out that the quality of fellowship highlighted by Philip and Carol Zaleski was the very essence of what the Inklings represented. Thus, although the name 'Inklings' derived from an initiative taken in 1932 by an Oxford undergraduate named Edward Tangye Lean to form a literary society of students and dons,² there is – as our authors suggest (pp. 110 and 195) – much to be said for the idea that what we now know as the Inklings circle had its origin in the regular meetings of a group of Oxford undergraduates around Lewis and Barfield in the early 1920s to discuss religion, philosophy and literature, and in the vibrant debates and philosophical discussions – associated with

1 *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* 1 (1980), Introduction.

2 See Peter Gilliver's essay in the present volume, *Journal of Inklings Studies* 6, no. 2 (2016), pp. 63-78.

walking tours on the Berkshire Downs and elsewhere – taking place at Barfield's and Cecil Harwood's cottage on the fringe of Beckley (near Oxford), whither Lewis would eagerly cycle to engage in his 'Great War' with his Second Friend. By the late 1920's, a core group consisting of Lewis, Tolkien, Barfield and other less regular members were meeting in Lewis's rooms in Magdalen College; and when Lean completed his undergraduate studies, the name 'Inklings' came to be linked to this well-established extra-curricular philosophical form of human engagement. However, it is significant that by the point in the Zaleskis' book when 'Inklings Assemble' (chapter 9, roughly two-fifths of the way through the book), the biographical strands of Tolkien's and Lewis's (and also Barfield's) lives have already threaded through the succession of early chapters; and in chapter 8 ('A Meeting of Minds'), other 'proto-Inklings' groups are also described where Tolkien had a greater founding role. It is, moreover, a distinct virtue of this book that a number of other individuals who made contributions either throughout the life of the Inklings circle or at one or another time are also given their due place. These include Lewis's older brother Warren ('Warnie'), Nevill Coghill, Lord David Cecil, Adam Fox, Colin Hardie, J.A.W. Bennett, 'Hugo' Dyson and – in the early years – Cecil Harwood, Leo Baker, and W. Eric Beckett and latterly Tolkien's youngest son, Christopher.

Whereas the early chapters of the book are, in accordance with an essentially chronological framework, devoted to one or another member of the Inklings circle, these biographical and literary strands are – after a tenth chapter which is exclusively devoted to Charles Williams, who arrived in Oxford in September 1939 and lit up the Inklings' war-time meetings like an incandescent star until his death in 1945 – skilfully interwoven into the subsequent chapters, so that, while there is ample discussion of key literary productions of the period, the reader has abundant opportunity to gain insight into the way that the principal protagonists interacted with one another. Here the authors really come into their own. In the first place, they are genuinely interested in this area of human engagement, where they are wholly sympathetic observers who are, nevertheless, not shy of acknowledging the more destructive aspects of what they see (for example, the rudeness of Hugo Dyson that served as 'a slow-acting

poison' (p. 359)). Secondly, their judgements are almost invariably generous and empathetic, wholly free of that so prevalent tendency to mock, even where – as sometimes happens – they are encountering phenomena that they find puzzling or disturbing. (Even at the risk of being accused of partisanship, I feel justified in pointing out in this regard that I found their discussion of Owen Barfield's book *Unancestral Voice* [pp. 482-3] especially limited and even blinkered, for reasons that it would not be appropriate to enlarge upon here. This is particularly curious in view of Philip Zaleski's description of R.J. Reilly's book *Romantic Religion: A Study of Owen Barfield, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien*, where there is a very lucid and substantial analysis of this seminal book by Barfield, as being 'a splendid book' containing 'a wealth of provocative insights'.) Thirdly, they write in full awareness and acknowledgement of the academic context of their subjects' work, which was (and is) by no means uncritical – not least on the part of members of the Cambridge English faculty such as F.D. Leavis, who did not appreciate Lewis's Christian apologetics. Fourthly, the book is mercifully free from any hagiographical tendency and is engirdled by a gentle humour, which is reflective of the characters involved in this literary fellowship. In sum, Philip and Carol Zaleski have done more than any previous students of the Inklings to confirm that, whereas a particular member of the group may not always have appreciated the literary offerings of certain of the others (and various examples are given in the book), it is indeed justified to speak of the 'fellowship of the Inklings'. It also helps that the book is so well-written. My review copy arrived by post on Christmas Eve and was a gratifying companion to the festive season of the twelve Holy Nights.

As the authors point out in their prologue, by the time the last Inklings died on the eve of the twenty-first century (Owen Barfield died on 14 December 1997 in his hundredth year), 'the group had altered, in large or small measure, the course of imaginative literature (fantasy, allegory, mythopoeic tales), Christian theology and philosophy, comparative mythology, and the scholarly study of the *Beowulf* author, of Dante, Spenser, Milton [and one might also add, of Samuel Taylor Coleridge], courtly love, fairy tale and epic; and drawing as much from their scholarship as from their experience of a catastrophic century, they had fashioned a new narrative of hope amid the ruins of war,

industrialization, cultural disintegration, skepticism, and anomic...’ (p. 4). And a little later they make the striking claim (which from a certain perspective at least it would be difficult to refute) that, in contrast to another major English literary circle active in the first part of the twentieth century, the Bloomsbury Group, ‘which now seems part of history, a brilliant stream of art and thought that one admires over one’s shoulder’, the Inklings ‘continue to shape significant aspects of modern religion and worldwide culture’ (p.10). It is, of course, true that there are substantial areas of modern social and cultural life where the impulses that the Inklings nurtured and cherished seem to have little place, and where fear, hatred and doubt of the spirit and a concomitant impoverishment of the inner life of the soul hold unbridled sway. Even so, however, the authors are rightly able to point out in their epilogue that the Inklings were ‘squarely addressing modern anxieties and longings’, and that therefore ‘what permanent place [they] may come to occupy in Christian renewal and, more broadly, in intellectual and artistic history, is for the future to decide’ (p. 512).

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Janet Brennan Croft and Leslie A. Donovan (eds), *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Altadena, CA: Mythopoetic Press, 2015. 358 pp. ISBN 978-1887726016.

It is a felicitous time for a publication of scholarly essays on the women in Tolkien’s life and works. Questions of gender and femininity are at the forefront of current cultural conversations, and a collection on C.S. Lewis and women has prompted wider interest in the topic among Inklings scholars. The editors of *Perilous and Fair* are to be commended for answering the need for a similar collection on Tolkien, and for setting an admirable example of how such a collection of essays should be edited and curated.

The collection is prefaced by an introduction outlining the sequence and subjects of the chapters. The body of fourteen essays is divided into five sections. The first, ‘Historical Context’, opens

with a bibliographic essay providing a comprehensive list, and brief explanation, of the scholarly work that has been done on the subject of Tolkien and women since the 1970s. This impressive list makes the reader appreciate the difficult task of the editors who have chosen the classics to present in the more accessible form of this collection. An essay by John D. Rateliff, the only male contributor to the volume, offers a detailed account of the different women who had opportunity to significantly influence Tolkien's life, and presents well-grounded examples of Tolkien's support for women's higher education. It is regrettable that Rateliff's contribution is the only article concerned with the women in Tolkien's life (the other articles only have cursory mentions, if any, of these women). Concluding this section, Sharin Schroeder's essay examines *The Lord of the Rings* with consideration of genre influence, particularly what books may have contributed to Tolkien's view and presentation of the women. Although the essay focuses more on H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* and nineteenth-century genre than on Tolkien, the essay gives a broader historical context of the popular genres in Tolkien's time, and offers original and thought-provoking insights about the 'ingredients' that may have been included in the 'soup' of Tolkien's imagination, as he described it himself.

The second section, entitled 'Power of Gender', includes essays by Melanie A. Rawls, Nancy Enright, and Edith L. Crowe. As opposed to building on often narrow contemporary views of power and gender, Rawls and Enright both skillfully reexamine our understanding of those concepts. Rawls offers in-depth examples of how Tolkien understood the feminine and the masculine as engaging in the dance of complementary, while Enright brilliantly challenges typical conceptions of power by turning the definition on its head: Instead of working within the common conceptual framework that tries to transfer 'masculine' power to women, Enright offers a broader definition of power and demonstrates that, according to Tolkien, the power of women transcends the physical and dominating kind of influence usually meant by the term. Oftentimes, gender studies are preoccupied with the idea of power as being the greatest good, suggesting that the important work of feminism is to transfer power to women. Those who are frustrated with a preoccupation with power

(which they may consider as deserving of attention — along with other goods such as character, love, happiness, virtue, and strength — but not of primary focus) will find the work of Rawls and Enright immensely refreshing. Concluding this section, Edith L. Crowe works within the more typical understanding of power and analyzes how it is presented in Tolkien's work, emphasizing that her findings illustrate that Tolkien should appeal to most feminists. She appreciates Tolkien's complicated attitude toward gender roles while wisely underscoring that his vision of healthy interaction between men and women is characterized by linking, as opposed to ranking.

The selection of works on 'Specific Characters' includes essays that focus on Galadriel, Luthien, Nienna, and Éowyn. This rich selection demonstrates the complexity of Tolkien's female characters, and challenges readers to reconsider certain feminine qualities and their potential for strength. The assertion that their femininity is the very source of these characters' strength, as opposed to a cause of weakness, results in compelling essays that offer an intellectual feast and invite further discussion on the vibrant women in Tolkien's world.

The fourth section of the volume examines 'Earlier Literary Contexts', which appropriately include the Medieval and Renaissance sources that likely contributed to Tolkien's portrayal of women. While duly respecting Tolkien's distaste for analyzing sources of inspiration, volume editor Leslie A. Donovan begins this section with an article skillfully and systematically demonstrating the similarities between Tolkien's female characters and the Valkyries of Norse Mythology. Donovan's illuminating scholarship illustrates the influence of Norse mythology and 'Northernness' in Tolkien's creative works. The contribution by Phoebe C. Linton examines the character of Éowyn in light of the female medieval knight, suggesting that the presentation of Éowyn's character is reminiscent of the Romance quest conventions used in medieval literature. Finally, Maureen Thum concludes this section with an intriguing piece that considers how both Tolkien and Shakespeare use the defamiliarizing conventions of carnival and masking to challenge a traditional understanding of gender roles. Although this essay assumes a more narrow definition of power and makes some unlikely conclusions concerning authorial intent, the piece as a whole is engaging and thought-provoking.

The fifth and final section, entitled 'Women Readers', comprises a single essay by Una McCormack that focuses on the reception of Tolkien's work by female readers, including in fan fiction. It is an odd concluding essay, as its content adopts an attitude that seems to negate the majority of the prior essays. While most of the essays in this collection demonstrate how Tolkien paid due consideration to the power and complexity of his female characters and that women should be able to enjoy Tolkien unashamedly, McCormack begins by explaining that she loved Tolkien *despite* his shortcomings concerning female characters. However, this essay offers insight into the world of fan fiction, especially the way that female fan fiction writers have coped with the comparative lack of women in Tolkien's legendarium by creating their own. It is regrettable, however, that this section fails to represent the number of women who feel no need to compensate for the purported shortcomings of Tolkien, such as Tolkien's own female pupils, but this may be because their position has not been explored in essay form.

It is important to note that the majority of this collection operates within the conceptual framework of feminism. This is not surprising, as the opening bibliographic essay suggests that a large bulk of the scholarship on Tolkien and women has been conducted by feminists. However, there are lamentable limitations within this framework. Several of the essayists admit to approaching the subject of Tolkien and women as feminists who wish to reconcile their love of Tolkien's works with their feminist beliefs. Their determination has helped answer challenging questions about Tolkien's characters, and those who have wondered how to answer the charge that Tolkien created too few female characters in his legendarium will find this volume a valuable companion. However, in some cases, this agenda has produced essays that are preoccupied with defending Tolkien or claiming him for the feminist cause, rather than simply asking what Tolkien thought about women, gender, and the feminine.

The framework of feminism is problematic partly because of its wide range of potential meanings over the course of the period from which these essays are drawn, from the promotion of gender equality to the annihilation of gender roles altogether. The terms *feminism* and *pro-women* are no longer synonymous, as an individual can be *pro-women*

(and simultaneously pro-men) without subscribing to the opinions or assumptions of a particular feminist agenda. Tolkien might be more clearly understood if (often anachronistic) questions of ‘feminism’ were left to one side while scholars demonstrated that he was pro-women, appreciating the equal value of men and women while celebrating the remarkable and complementary differences of genders and individuals. This understanding might also help free women readers and essay-writers from the impulse to defend their love of Tolkien, or to believe that Tolkien must be forgiven his shortcomings before he can be enjoyed. It may liberate them from the need to ‘find their place’ in the legendarium, and allow them to connect with all the characters, both male and female, as fellow persons. After all, the qualities we love in literature often belong to humanity as a whole, not just to men or women. Considering whether Tolkien’s works are compatible with feminism is an interesting point of study, but the collection could have benefitted from more diversity of intention.

The volume as a whole satisfies the curious, while encouraging the academically inclined to progress research in this area by following up with the plethora of detailed footnotes and bibliographies included. Tolkien enthusiasts and students alike will find that the vibrant discussion of the contributors engages their imagination, curiosity, convictions, and pleasures. It is truly a gift to the world of Tolkien scholarship.

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